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MERCIES AND DUTIES

CONSIDERED

IN

A SERMON,

Preached before the Thirteen FRIENDLY SOCIETIES,

ESTABLISHED IN

LANCASTER,

AT THEIR ANNIVERSARY MEETING,

MAY 13th, 1799.

By R. HOUSMAN, A. B.

MINISTER OF ST. ANN'S CHAPEL.

*And they remembered that God was their Rock, and the High God
their Redeemer.*

Psalm 78. 35

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MERCIES AND DUTIES,

&c.

PSALM CXLVII. 20.

*He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his
Judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye
the Lord.*

ANCIENT and modern infidels possess the same features, and direct their footsteps in the same crooked paths. Whilst, perhaps, in the plenitude of their indulgence, they will concede unto God that he exists, yet with all the foolishness of folly*, and with all the boldness of blasphemy, they deny his superintending care and controul over the affairs of men. They rob him of his honor, and they ascribe his universal agency to general laws, to second causes, to accident or to fate; as if the government of the world were a task either too difficult for the wisdom, too extensive for the presence, or too laborious for the power, of its great Creator.

It is the province of revealed religion to expose this ignorance, and to check this impiety. Christian-

* Prov. 14. 24.

ity teaches us the doctrine of a Providence. Of a providence so *particular*, as to notice the fall of a sparrow, and to number all the hairs of our heads: of a providence so *righteous*, as to ordain that sin and misery shall be inseparable associates: of a providence so *gracious*, as to make all things concur in promoting the everlasting welfare of those who love God.

If these observations be correct with respect to individuals, they are equally so with respect to kingdoms. "The Lord reigneth, be the earth never so unquiet." "He sitteth in the heavens over all from the beginning." He calleth into existence the various nations of the earth: and, when they abuse his goodness, and fill up the measure of their iniquities, he sinketh them into the dust.

These general remarks may lead us, by a very easy and obvious transition, to apply to ourselves what the Psalmist applied to the kingdom of Israel. "He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord." I hope it will appear that the subject I have chosen, is not altogether unsuitable to the present occasion. The times render it appropriate; and if the discussion of it can be combined with a due attention to the societies here assembled, the propriety of that discussion will not be denied.

There are two leading points which demand our regard.

I. *Our mercies.*

II. *Our duties.*

I consider

I. *Our mercies.*

It cannot be expected in a discourse so limited as the present must be, that I can notice *every* national blessing, or describe with sufficient minuteness, or bring into a point of view sufficiently luminous, those which I would press upon your attention. All that can be done, will be to draw some outlines of that body of our mercies, which in all its features is beautiful, and in all its parts complete.

I remind you

(1) *Of the equity of our laws.* "What nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous *?" They are not the wild and untried productions of speculative philosophers, who are generally disposed to reject every thing which sober sense would recommend, and which long experience has sanctioned,—but they have Reason for a basis, they rest upon the pillars of Justice and Mercy, and they have received increasing excellence and beauty from the wise and persevering efforts of successive generations. They are framed upon the principles of the Constitution, which has long been the admiration of the whole civilized world,—a Constitution, which guards with equal care and success against the encroachments of tyranny on the one hand, and the mischievous madness of anarchy on the other,—a Constitution, which directs that the hand of vengeance shall fall, with equal readiness and with equal weight, upon the head of the rich offender, as it does upon that of the poor transgressor.

* Deuter. 4, 8.

(2) *We possess perfect Liberty.* True and rational liberty consists in speaking and acting according to the dictates of our inclination, with these exceptions only—that our speech and our conduct shall not injure the character, or affect the property, or deprave the morals, or wound the happiness, of our fellow subjects. And who is there that possesses hardihood sufficient as to say, that we *ought* to be permitted to commit these outrages? And who is there so brutalized by ingratitude as to assert, that, with the exceptions already stated, we are not gloriously and completely free? I appeal to yourselves. You *feel* that you enjoy all the liberty, which, in a state of society, can fall to the lot of man. You *know* that your House, though it may be a humble one, is your Castle. Thither you can retire, after the labours of the day, in security and peace. There, within the bosom of your family, and without the fear of molestation, you may receive the delightful evidence that the fruits of your honest diligence are supporting and comforting the connections which you love. And there, while “sitting under your own vine, and under your own fig-tree,” your hearts should glow with gratitude to God, that your *all*, whether it be little or much, is sweetened by a sense of freedom, and is guarded by the arm of that mighty Government, under which He has appointed that you should live.

Another blessing which may be glanced at, is

(3) *Liberty of Conscience,—a complete and universal toleration.*

It has seemed good to the wisdom of our ancestors that there should be an *Establishment*, in order

that they who might be too indolent to seek after, or too covetous to provide for, or too wicked even to desire, the administration of religious worship, should have it statedly brought within their view, and pressed upon their attention. The doctrines of this Establishment, as declared in our articles, are doctrines according to godliness: its ceremonies are few, simple, and impressive: its prayers are comprehensive of every want, and expressive of every devout affection: so that we may safely assert, that if every member within the communion of the Church received her principles in truth, and joined in her services with suitable dispositions, she would soon be, like Zion of old, "the Joy of the whole earth." But many dissent from our Establishment; and God forbid that we should question the purity of the motives from which they act: God forbid that we should wish to draw them before any human tribunal. "To their own Master they stand or fall." That they are protected by the laws of the land in the public profession of their religious principles, must give pleasure to every mind, that is not lost to the generous feelings of Candour. And whilst this unrestrained liberty of Conscience proclaims the magnanimity of that Nation, which dares to say "Be free,"—it should, on the one hand, be received with respectful gratitude, and, on the other, be acknowledged as a blessing from God: for from him proceedeth "every good and every perfect gift."

But there are recent mercies, which call for no common measure of grateful and adoring acknowledgment.

I need scarcely bring to your recollection, for surely the interposition is written indelibly upon every mind, that

(4) *Our God was a "very present help to us" in that time of our trouble, when a most awful mutiny prevailed in our fleets.* We then saw that to depend upon an arm of flesh is to rest upon a broken reed, or upon the point of a spear: we were then compelled to feel, that they who have been called the bulwarks of the land, might, in the moment of their frenzy, prove its destroyers. That season was the darkest which this kingdom ever saw. The scale in which its glory and perhaps its existence were suspended, seemed exactly balanced. A deep and settled melancholy sat upon every countenance, except upon the countenances of those, who look for plunder in the midst of general confusion, or who would gratify their malignity at the risk of national ruin. But God Almighty, though he threatened, did not give us over unto death. When he had taught us to see that all our consequence as a nation, and all our comforts as men, might soon be laid low in one common grave, He appeared for our deliverance, and dispelled the gloom. He stilled the madness of the people, he blasted the hopes of the rebellious, and he "put a new song into our mouth, even thanksgiving unto our God."

It is written,

(5) *He "giveth victory unto kings."* Wisdom in directing operations, and courage in the moment of conflict, are the gifts of God. Without his protection and blessing, "the counsels of the wise are vain, and the multitude of an host is weak." With-

out his protection and blessing, "one thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one*:" nay, to use the still bolder language of inspiration, they would be "crushed before the moth†." If, then, the battle be the Lord's, and if in many naval conflicts, upon the issue of which the kingdom seemed to be at stake, we have been preserved and triumphant, O let not the hard heart of Infidelity attempt to rob us of the delightful consciousness, that, "the Lord of hosts is with us, that the God of Jacob is our refuge." But with or without the permission of those who dispute the controlling providence of God, we will venture to say, and we will glory in saying it, "Thou hast covered our head in the day of battle." "Thou art our God and we will thank thee, thou art our God and we will praise thee."

Another mercy which demands a large tribute of attention and gratitude, is this,

(6) *Our Country, though engaged in war, has not been the seat of warfare.*

We have not trembled at the approach of those disturbers of the human race, at whose presence all nature shudders, and all comfort disappears: who speak of peace, but who delight only in tumult: whose language is the language of benevolence, but whose deeds are deeds of blood: whose hostility is less to be dreaded than their kindness, for even their "tender mercies are cruel:" whose fraternity is bondage, and whose friendship is death. We have not seen these scourges of mankind de-

* Isaiah 30. 17.

† Job. 4. 19.

froying the labour of our husbandmen, and making the land a desolate wilderness. We have not seen our streets flowing with human blood, nor heard the groans of the wounded and the dying. We have not been compelled to listen with anxious solicitude to every rumour, lest it should bear upon its wings the melancholy tidings that a friend, a parent, a brother, or a child, had fallen in the awful conflict. From these agonizing apprehensions, from this maddening anguish, under which multitudes have groaned, we have been mercifully exempt. And where is the man that can refuse to say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise?"

(7) *We have not only been preserved from the terror of the ARMS of our enemies, but from the far greater evil, the malignant poison of their PRINCIPLES.*

In the mysterious counsels of God, an awful and an extensive experiment has been permitted to be made: and the result of that experiment will surely teach wisdom from generation to generation. What has been called "The Tree of Liberty," has been planted with a diligence but too successful, and, to use the savage language of a man who has not yet filled up the measure of his iniquities, it has been "moistened with the blood of Kings*." This tree, which was expected, like the vine brought out of Egypt, to "stretch out its branches unto the sea, and its boughs unto the river," so that all the nations might sit under its shadow with great delight,

* Barrere:

—this tree has proved like one which is well known in a Western climate. Nothing will flourish within its influence. The breezes which blow through it become breezes of pestilence, and the drops which distil from it are charged with venom. And, with respect to the nature of its fruit, let the broken hearts of millions declare, let the rivers of blood which have been shed lift up their voice, let the strong language of inspiration describe. It is written in Deut. 32. 32. and the application perhaps is but too obvious, “ Their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter.” But to drop the metaphor. Subordination is the appointment of God. The attempt therefore to establish the system of Equality, is an attempt against the Most High: consequently, it has issued, as all such attempts *must* issue, in aggravated misery, in extended ruin, in the desolation and wreck of every comfort, in the rending asunder of every tie which unites man to man, and man to happiness.

From these pernicious principles, and from their destructive effects, we, as a Nation, have been preserved. The awful eye of Jehovah has watched over us for our good. He has brought into view the dark designs of conspiracy, and dashed in pieces the chain which would have bound us to destruction.

Having enumerated some of our leading national mercies, it may be expected that I should close this part of my discourse. But I should be doing injustice to my subject; I should, by a criminal neglect, be dishonouring God, if I did not endeavour

to direct your thoughts far above the transitory things of the earth. "The fashion of this world passeth away." The moment is appointed, and the moment is hastening on, when "the Heavens shall be wrapped up like a scroll, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat;" when the earth and the sea shall give up their dead: when the Son of God shall take his seat upon the throne of judgment, and shall appoint to all the millions of mankind a boundless Eternity,—to some an Eternity of Joy, to others an Eternity of Sorrow. It follows, therefore, that if it be proper to review the mercies which relate to this world, there is a ten-fold propriety in fixing the attention upon those, through which we may rejoice for ever and ever.

Here, then, I would remind you that our God has "remembered us in our low estate," and has "raised up an horn of salvation for us, in the house of his servant David." Jesus Christ has appeared to purchase, and to offer, present and eternal peace. And they, who, in sorrow for their sins, return unfeignedly unto God, trusting for their acceptance to the blood of his Son, are interested in a blessedness, too rich and too extensive for even the tongue of an Archangel adequately to describe:—in a blessedness, which comprehends the pardon of all iniquity, adoption unto the family of God, sanctification of the heart by the power of the Holy Ghost: guidance in difficulties, and consolation in distress: strength in the hours of weakness, and serenity in the moments of death: a holy triumph in the day of judgment, and a crown of glory un-

fading and eternal. These vast and comprehensive blessings are promised in the Gospel to "every creature," who, with hearty repentance, and true faith, and real devotedness of heart, seeks a neglected God, through Jesus Christ.

The consideration that *we* are included in this invitation of mercy,—that "whosoever will, may take the water of life freely*," must surely find its way to our hearts, and lead us to say, with a peculiar emphasis of adoring astonishment, OUR GOD IS LOVE.

Having thus taken a brief view of our *mercies*, we ought to consider

II. *Our Duties.*

And here I would say to you all, and I would say to myself,

(1) *"Be clothed with Humility."*

Though the volume of our blessings has been written closely, and written both within and without, yet we have been so wickedly ingenious as to interline it with the black characters of ingratitude and disobedience. May God Almighty grant to each of us that broken and contrite heart, which He will not despise!

(2) *Give glory unto God, by accepting with fervent gratitude that rich redemption, which he graciously offers you through the Son of his love.*

* Rev. 22. 17. Though multitudes treat the Invitation, and the God who gives it, with a most ungrateful and ruinous neglect, yet this circumstance, awful and melancholy as it is, does not affect the argument. The *offer* is sincere and universal; and it is this which establishes a claim upon the fervent gratitude of all, to whom the words of this salvation are sent.

Study with diligence this vast scheme of his wisdom and mercy, and seek to say with the Apostle, and with the Apostle's ardour, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

(3) *Let the Mercies of God bind you to his service for ever.*

Experiencing the power, and acting from the principle of love, his "yoke will be easy, and his burden light." Your obedience will be the thankful offerings of a Child, feeling a sense of infinite obligation, delighting in the indulgence of grateful affections, and exulting in the prospect of eternal blessedness.

These are *general* duties, incumbent upon all. In the few observations which I shall yet offer, I shall address myself exclusively to the Societies here assembled.

If, my friends, you only fill up the lower stations in the Community, you fill them up by the appointment of God. He has determined the bounds of your habitations*. This conviction should stifle every murmur, if at any time a rebellious murmur should endeavour to arise, because you have to earn your bread by the sweat of your brow. And remember, that if you duly improve your *one* talent, you will receive at the last a "Well done," while the rich abuser of ten talents will be "cast into outer darkness." Study, then, the duties which result from your particular situations.

As members of your respective societies, "live in unity!" "Be kindly affectioned one to another in

* Acts 17. 26.

brotherly love." And let those, to whom God shall dispense a continued measure of health and comfort, rejoice in the reflection that they are contributors to a Fund which is watching over *the sorrows of others*, which is dealing out bread to the hungry, and which is giving to many a family of affliction, "the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

As men, be "temperate in all things." If you step beyond the limits of sobriety, you will find nothing in those forbidden haunts, but injured health, impoverished circumstances, the tears of a neglected family, the awful anger of your God.

As subjects, live in meek submission to the established laws, and cultivate a veneration and attachment towards that gracious Sovereign, who is less exalted by the dignity of his station, than by the virtues of his life.

As husbands, remember and fulfil the vows which you made before the altar of God. In the great and awful name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, you pledged yourselves for a respectful and affectionate conduct towards those, to whom ye were then united. If you break your engagements, the sin of perjury lies at your door. But if you perform your vows, the habits of mutual affection will pay you your own with usury. As you travel through this wilderness of uncertainty and trial, every sorrow will be diminished by the endearments of sympathy, and every joy will be increased by the delightful consciousness, that it is giving joy to those who are so near your hearts.

As fathers, consider the momentous talent which is committed to your management. Your children are immortal: and *you* may be the instruments of making their immortality either a blessing or a curse. If you neglect the culture of their minds, or set before them an evil example, you may meet them at a time, and under circumstances, most awfully tremendous. You may meet them at the judgment seat of Christ, and you may hear them, with horror in their hearts, and destruction in their view, loading *you* with accusations as the authors of their ruin. On the contrary, if you "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;"—if you train them up to habits of diligence and truth; if you lead them stately to the worship of God, and teach them the way of salvation by Jesus Christ:—if you thus shew them the path to Heaven, and walk before them in your own experience and example, you may expect that your children, as they rise up in life, will call you blessed. You may expect that they will be the comfort of your sorrowful hours, and the staff of your declining age. And you may expect to join them in those mansions of blessedness, where all "the ransomed of the Lord" shall meet to part no more.

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THE END.

